

ARGUMENTS/REMARKS

Applicants would like to thank the examiner for the careful consideration given the present application. The application has been carefully reviewed in light of the Office action, and amended as necessary to more clearly and particularly describe and claim the subject matter which applicants regard as the invention.

The Examiner argues that the provisional application 60/271,289 does not support claim limitations directed to a hollow perform comprised of “a plurality of discrete reinforcing fibers intimately intermixed with a plurality of discrete thermoplastic fibers”. Regardless of whether this is true or not, applicant’s representative notes that not all claims recite such a limitation. For example, claims 36 and 44 do not recite such limitations, as there is no recitation of thermoplastic fibers. Accordingly, applicant believes that the provisional application is a proper priority document for at least some of the claims.

Claims 1–20, 24–32, 35–42, and 44–45, remain in this application. Claims 21–23, 33–34, and 43 have been canceled. Claims 1-20, 24-32, and 38-42 are allowed.

Claims 36–37 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph, for reciting an element lacking proper antecedent basis. Claim 36 has been amended, making the rejection moot.

Claims 35–36 and 44–45 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Wiltshire (U.S. 4,101,254) in view of Evans (U.S. 2003/0054150 A1). For the following reasons, the rejection is respectfully traversed.

Wiltshire does not teach the use of any “flexible, inflatable core” or any step of inflating said core in its disclosed inventive process. Although Wiltshire does teach that it is known to use an inflatable core in a perform/mat combination during curing (see col. 1, lines 10–18), the invention of Wiltshire does not use such a feature, and in fact uses an alternative feature and rejects the prior art process, and thus teaches away from any modification to use the prior art process. Wiltshire teaches that reinforcing fibers are chopped onto a vacuum screen, the fibers are sprayed with a resin, and then the screen with fibers and resin thereon is placed into an oven, where the perform is cured on the

screen itself (see col. 3, lines 14-49 and Fig. 1). Thus, because the preform is still on the screen during curing, and because there is no teaching of inflating any inflatable core in the perform, the reference cannot use the disclosed prior art method.

Furthermore, it would not be possible for Wiltshire to be combined with the prior art method of using an inflatable core. This is because such a core would block the vacuum screen from attracting the reinforcing fibers, and thus the use of any such core would prevent the practice of the Wiltshire method. Such a modification would not be proper, because the claimed combination cannot change the principle of operation of the primary reference or render the reference inoperable for its intended purpose. MPEP § 2143.01. Accordingly, the Examiner cannot combine Wiltshire with its teaching of the prior art use of the inflatable core.

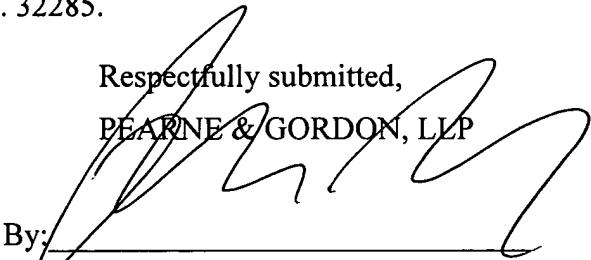
In addition, Wiltshire teaches away from the disclosed prior art process because the reference teaches that the use of the prior art mat sidewalls is a disadvantage that the reference is trying to overcome (see col. 1, lines 31-35). Thus, for this reason as well, the reference teaches away from the prior art process. There is no suggestion of combining the prior art process with the inventive process, and in fact the reference clearly teaches away from any such use, and thus Wiltshire cannot be used to render the invention according to claims 35-36 and 44-45 obvious.

Evans fails to overcome the Wiltshire shortcomings. Even though the Examiner cites Evans as teaching a curing process under pressure, even if true such a process cannot be used with an inflatable core in the Wiltshire process without defeating the intended operation of the process, as discussed above. Accordingly, claims 35-36 and 44-45 are patentable over the references.

Still further, claim 44 recites the step of “assembling a preform including said domed top portion and a reinforcing mat wrapped to form a cylindrical sidewall portion of said perform”. As discussed above, Wiltshire specifically teaches away from using such a mat as being a disadvantage, and thus the mat disclosed in the Background of Wiltshire cannot be used in the Wiltshire process. Furthermore, the use of any such mat would interfere with the vacuum screen function, similar to how the inflatable core would interfere. Thus, claims 44-45 are patentable over the references for this reason as well.

In consideration of the foregoing analysis, it is respectfully submitted that the present application is in a condition for allowance and notice to that effect is hereby requested. If it is determined that the application is not in a condition for allowance, the examiner is invited to initiate a telephone interview with the undersigned attorney to expedite prosecution of the present application.

If there are any fees resulting from this communication, please charge same to our Deposit Account No. 16-0820, our Order No. 32285.

Respectfully submitted,
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